

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 9734

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR PORG MILI LE IS
SUBJ: S LEBANON - ISRAELI POSITION ON HADDAD/SHIDDIAC

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 9718, (B) STATE 193265, (C) BEIRUT 4359

1. IN TRYING TO ANSWER THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE ISRAELIS WOULD ACQUIESCE IN THE DEPARTURE OF HADDAD AND SHIDDIAC FROM THE MILITIA BUFFER ZONE IF THE LEBANESE OFFERED A FACESAVING DEAL WHICH WAS ACCEPTABLE TO THE TWO MEN, IT WONT BE OF MUCH USE TO QUIZ THE GOI. WEIZMAN WILL SAY THAT IT DEPENDS. IT DEPENDS ON THE NATURE OF THE DEAL. IT DEPENDS ON WHO WOULD REPLACE HADDAD AND SHIDDIAC. IT DEPENDS ON THE LONG TERM INTENTION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY WITH RESPECT TO THE ENCLAVES AND THE GOOD FENCE. IT DEPENDS ON THE ROLE OF THE SYRIANS AND THE PALESTINIANS. IT DEPENDS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UNIFIL. IN OTHER WORDS, THE ISRAELIS WOULD, AS IN THE PAST, PUT MANY

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HEDGES IN THE WAY OF OUR ATTEMPT TO GET A STRAIGHT ANSWER FROM THEM. SO WHAT FOLLOWS IS OUR BEST GUESS.

2. THE OVERRIDING ISRAELI OBJECTIVE ON THIS ISSUE IS TO KEEP THE CHRISTIAN BUFFERS IN PLACE AS AN EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SEPARATE THE PALESTINIANS FROM PROXIMITY TO THE ISRAELI NORTHERN BORDER. IN THE PAST AND AT THE PRESENT,

HADDAD AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, SHIDDIAC, HAVE BEEN THE INSTRUMENTS OF THIS ISRAELI OBJECTIVE. IF THEIR DEPARTURE WERE TO MEAN A GRADUAL OR PERHAPS RAPID END OF THE ENCLAVES AS SEMI-INDEPENDENT ENTITIES, IN OUR JUDGMENT THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT WANT HADDAD AND SHIDDIAC TO LEAVE, IF ON THE OTHER HAND, THE GOI COULD BE ASSURED THAT A CHANGE IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE SOUTH WOULD NOT MEAN A CHANGE IN THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND, THEY MIGHT BE WILLING TO ACQUIESCE. HOWEVER, WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT FOR THE ISRAELIS ANY CHANGE IN WHAT HAS BEEN A RELATIVELY STABLE SITUATION FOR THEM IN SOUTH LEBANON PRODUCES RISKS - RISKS THEY VERY WELL MAY NOT WISH TO TAKE.

3. THEREFORE, WE MAY BE ABLE TO MAKE SOME SLIGHT HEADWAY WITH THE ISRAELIS ON HADDAD AND SHIDDIAC'S DEPARTURE IF WE CAN SAY AT THE SAME TIME THAT THERE WILL BE NO SUBSEQUENT IMMEDIATE ATTEMPT BY THE LAF TO TRY TO OCCUPY THE ENCLAVES. HOWEVER, ISRAELI SUSPICIONS, AS EVIDENCED IN MY CONVERSATION LAST NIGHT WITH WEIZMAN, OF COURSE COULD NOT BE HIGHER IN THIS REGARD. THE GOI SEEMS CERTAIN THAT THE REMOVAL OF HADDAD AND SHIDDIAC IS A LEBANESE-SYRIAN PLOT TO DISARM THE CHRISTIANS AND EXTEND SYRIAN INFLUENCE INTO SOUTH LEBANON. AS LONG AS THE ISRAELIS BELIEVE THIS IS A REAL POSSIBILITY, AND AS LONG AS THEY FEEL THE GOOF FENCE IS THREATENED, THEY WILL, TO USE THE LANGUAGE OF REFTEL B, "WANT THE TWO MEN TO REFUSE ANY SECRET

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LEBANESE DEAL AND STAY IN THE BUFFER ZONE INDEFINITELY." I HAVE RELUCTANTLY CONCLUDED THAT AT THE PRESENT TIME EVEN IF HADDAD WANTED TO LEAVE, THE ISRAELIS WOULD DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO STOP HIM.

4. HAVE JUST RECEIVED BEIRUT 4359 CONCERNING THE "RED HERRINGS." WE THINK IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY UNWISE FOR THE USG TO TRY TO MANEUVER AN AMERICAN OFFICER ASSIGNED TO THE UN INTO A POSITION AS A PRIVATE NEGOTIATOR WITH HADDAD. UP UNTIL TWO DAYS AGO ERSKINE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN TALKING TO BOTH HADDAD AND THE ISRAELIS AS IF HE WAS ANTICIPATING CONTINUING COOPERATION WITH HADDAD IN WORKING OUT UNIFIL'S DEPLOYMENT IN THE AREA. WE HAVE AT NO TIME BEEN AUTHORIZED TO ALERT THE ISRAELIS AS TO WHAT WAS IN STORE IN LEBANESE MINDS FOR HADDAD. ISRAELI SUSPICIONS OF UN CONNIVANCE ON THE HADDAD QUESTION WERE VERY EVIDENT AT OUR MEETING WITH WEIZMAN LAST NIGHT. OUR CREDIBILITY IS ALSO IN QUESTION ON THIS OPERATION. I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE VERY DAMAGING TO RISK THE COURSE WHICH AMBASSADOR PARKER SUGGESTS: MOREOVER, I DO NOT THINK IT WOULD WORK. IF THERE IS SOME OVERRIDING NEED TO PROBE HADDAD'S INNER MOST THOUGHTS, IT SHOULD BE DONE BY SOME NON-AMERICAN. LEWIS

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